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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [CH](#) [HK](#)
SUBJECT: CE TSANG ON DEMOCRACY ROADMAP: DEFINITELY
NOT...WELL, MAYBE

REF: (A) HONG KONG 2031 (B) HONG KONG 1918 (C) HONG
KONG 335

Classified By: Acting Consul General Christopher Marut for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary and comment: The much-anticipated November 6 meeting between the pan-democrats and Chief Executive Donald Tsang on the government's coming consultation paper on constitutional reform ended with a "maybe" on a roadmap to universal suffrage. Tsang initially tried to keep the pan-democrats focused on arrangements for 2012, on grounds that this was the framework laid down by the National People's Congress Standing Committee and because post-2012 issues were too controversial for Hong Kong to reach consensus. Tsang eventually undertook to "try to incorporate" pan-democratic views in the consultation document, a statement the pan-democrats rate as less than a firm promise. The pan-democrats themselves have found unity elusive, but were able to agree on a few core principles to take to the meeting, including the demand for the roadmap. Meanwhile, media quoted a pan-democratic legislator as saying Beijing had intimated a deal might be struck on universal suffrage elections in 2017/2020 -- if the pan-democrats supported the government's proposal on 2012. The best that can be said of the November 6 meeting is that the tone was calm and nothing bad happened. In the context of Tsang's relationship with the pan-democrats, that's as close to success as one could reasonably expect. End summary and comment.

Definitely Maybe

¶2. (C) Media and our pan-democratic contacts reported that the November 6 meeting between Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam-kuen and the pan-democratic caucus ended with a "maybe" on a roadmap to universal suffrage elections for the Chief Executive in 2017 and the Legislative Council (LegCo) in ¶2020. Confederation of Trade Unions (CTU) legislator Lee Cheuk-yan told us Tsang initially took two tacks to fend off the pan-democrats on the issue. First, Tsang stressed the need to stay within parameters set by the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPC/SC), which Tsang maintains cover 2012 elections only. Lee contested that, arguing that the NPC/SC did not rule out consideration of future arrangements. Second, Lee reports Tsang warned that it would be difficult to reach consensus on the "controversial" issues to be considered for the 2017 and 2020 elections. In the end, however, Civic Party Leader Audrey Eu Yuet-mei told the media that Tsang had agreed that he "would try to incorporate our views" into the consultation paper, an account CTU's Lee corroborated.

¶3. (C) The Civics' Tanya Chan Suk-chong told us the meeting was "calm", joking that "no bananas were thrown" (which may be because the League of Social Democrats' Leung "Long Hair"

Kwok-hung and Albert "Big Guy" Chan Wai-hip chose not to attend.) She told us the two sides essentially read their talking points to each other. She also reported Tsang dismissed the need to arrange a meeting between the pan-democrats and Beijing, on the grounds that Beijing had a clear understanding of the pan-democrats' views thanks to the media. While Tsang did not specifically agree to additional discussions, Chan felt he at least made positive noises.

¶4. (C) CTU's Lee told us Tsang said failure to make progress in 2012 would not necessarily preclude achieving universal suffrage in 2017. Lee contrasted this with comments by Central Government Liaison Office Director Li Gang a few days earlier, who stressed the need for 2012 as an interim step under the doctrine of "gradual and orderly progress."
(Comment: This is not the first time the Hong Kong government has attempted to de-couple progress in 2012 from universal suffrage in 2017; they have made the same point in discussions with us in the past (ref c). The pan-democrats wariness of this argument is well-founded, since Beijing will have the final word. End comment.)

¶5. (C) Media quoted Tsang as saying the consultation document was "a few pages from being finalized." CTU's Lee suggested the government was not quite so far advanced, and reported Tsang had said the document would be ready by the end of the month. (Note: In his October Policy Address, Tsang committed to issuing the consultation paper in November. End note.)

Pan-democrats: Elusive Consensus

HONG KONG 00002050 002 OF 002

¶6. (C) Already divided over whether to have members resign in order to use the resulting by-elections as a referendum on universal suffrage (ref b and previous), the pan-democrats reached unity on only a handful of core points prior to meeting Tsang. Contacts and media have quoted different versions of the agreed position, but most reports include:

-- The pro-forma call for universal suffrage elections in 2012 for both Chief Executive and LegCo. Failing that, the pan-democrats insist on

-- A roadmap to universal suffrage elections for 2017 and ¶2020. The pan-democrats have also called on Tsang to facilitate

-- A direct dialogue between the pan-democrats and Beijing.

Reports vary on whether the pan-democrats agreed to demand the abolition of functional constituencies or the "split-voting rule," which requires bills that originate in LegCo to win majorities of both directly-elected and functional constituency legislators to pass. Whether or not they laid these points on the table, the pan-democrats would certainly insist both demands be met in 2017 and 2020.

Beijing: Ready to do a Deal?

¶7. (C) The South China Morning Post gave front-page coverage to Democratic Party (DPHK) legislator Cheung Man-kwong's report that representatives of the State Council's Institute of Hong Kong and Macau Affairs were offering the pan-democrats their roadmap, provided they support the Hong Kong government's proposals for 2012. Cheung himself called on Beijing and the Hong Kong government to pledge that the nomination threshold for the 2017 Chief Executive election would not be more stringent than 2007, to state that functional constituencies were not compatible with universal suffrage, and to go from a "may" to an explicit commitment to universal suffrage elections in 2017 and 2020 (see ref a).

Whatever Cheung believes he heard from the Institute, DPHK strategist Law Chi-kwong dismissed the reports, reminding us of how many people claim to speak for the Central Government and how few actually do. Civic Party strategist Kenneth Chan Ka-lok was equally dubious of self-proclaimed middle-men from Beijing, although he reported his colleagues were trying to encourage Beijing to address demands for a roadmap.

MARUT